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1999 Louisiana Governor's Primary Election Survey

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1999 Louisiana Governor's Race

In a low interest, low salience governor's race, the incumbent Governor Foster has an overwhelming advantage over his main opponent, William Jefferson.

In an election with such a popular incumbent, most of the undecided vote can be categorized as against that incumbent because one can assume that a "don't know" response really represents reservations about the incumbent. If we assume that Foster receives only 20% of the Undecideds and those who refused to say, he still comfortably crosses the 50% mark needed to win in the primary.

If we assume a ten percent difference between white turnout and black turnout (which was the case in the 1995 gubernatorial primary), Foster receives over 50% of the vote, even without allocating any of the Undecideds.

As expected, vote preferences are *highly racially polarized*, with both candidates receiving 10% or less of the vote from the other racial group. Jefferson's support among blacks is most certainly underestimated here; the larger black undecided, plus those who say "other" (31%) may indicate that they are not sure who William Jefferson is yet.

Keep in mind that this survey represents opinions and preferences two weeks or more in advance of the

election, so we can expect many voters to be unsure since interest in the election is so low.

Governor Foster's approval rating remains at a high 72%, with a 36% gap between white approval and black approval. However, even with this racial polarization, nearly 50% of the black registered voters approve of Foster.

Vote Preference		
	All Registered Voters	Assuming 65% white turnout and 55% black turnout
Foster	48%	51%
Jefferson	20	18
Preis	2	2
Greene	2	2
Others	4	4
Refused	4	4
Undecided	20	19
N	803	477

Voter Preference by Race		
	White Voters	Black Voters
Foster	65%	10%
Jefferson	6	52
Preis	3	2
Greene	3	2
Others	3	4
Refused	4	3
Undecided	16	27
N	545	226

Approval of Foster's Job Performance			
	All	Whites	Blacks

Strongly Approve	35%	44%	15%
Approve	37	40	33
Disapprove	10	5	23
Strongly Disapprove	9	6	13
Don't Know	9	5	16
N	803	544	227

The Mood of the Electorate 1995-1999

According to every measure that we have, the mood of the Louisiana electorate has improved since the last governor's primary election in 1995, a factor which is surely contributing to Foster's high approval ratings and his margin in this election.

Four years ago, more people had a negative evaluation than a positive evaluation of the direction of the state's economy, but today those with a positive evaluation outnumber those with a negative evaluation by nearly three to one.

The UNO SRC has used three measures of trust in government adopted from the University of Michigan's National Election Studies, and on all three of these indicators trust in Louisiana state government has improved. For example, since 1995, the proportion of voters saying that you can trust state government "most of the time" has nearly doubled from 18% to 32%. Also, the pessimistic perception that state government is run for "big interests" has dropped from 76% to 57%.

On balance, the Louisiana electorate is still more cynical than trusting, but that is true of almost any group or geographic region in the country.

Perceptions of the State's Economy			
	1995	1996	1999
Better	20%	37%	43%
Same	42	41	40
Worse	33	18	15
Don't Know	5	4	2
N	805	711	803

Trust in State Government

"How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Baton Rouge to do what is right, just about always, most of the time or only some of the time?"

	1995	1999
Just about always	3%	7%
Most of the time	18	32
Only some of the time	70	53
None of the time	7	5
Don't Know	2	3
N	805	803

"Would you say that the government in Baton Rouge is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people?"

	1995	1999
Big Interests	76%	57%
Benefit of People	17	32
Don't Know	7	11
N	805	803

"Do you think the people in state government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?"

	1995	1999
Waste a lot	68%	53%
Waste Some	26	39
Don't Waste Much	3	6
Don't Know	3	2
N	805	803

In addition to improvements in perceptions of the economy and trust in state government, voters are more positive today about how the state is handling gambling than they were four years ago.

State Government Handling of Gambling		
	1995	1999
Approve	27%	40%
Disapprove	63	50
Don't Know	10	10
N	805	803

One of the most striking changes since 1995 is the *focus of the voters on education*. In previous surveys, both statewide and in the New Orleans metro area, education has typically been mentioned by 8-10% of voters as the biggest problem. However, the policies of Governor Foster, the educational reform in New Orleans, and media coverage of school performance have greatly increased the salience of this issue. Good economic times and greater trust in state government, in combination with attention from the governor provide a window of opportunity for improvements to Louisiana's schools.

Biggest Problem of Louisiana		
	1995	1999
Crime	15%	12%
Finances/Money	14	1
Politics/Corruption	13	4
Unemployment	10	5
Education	8	35
Gambling	7	1
Economy	7	3
Welfare	6	1
Other	20	38

Commissioner of Elections Race

The election for Commissioner of Elections has the *potential* for being an interesting election due to Fowler's indictment. However, at this point, few voters know or care about this race. Woody Jenkins leads, probably due to his statewide name recognition, but this race is wide open. About half of the electorate is not committed to any of the three major candidates.

Vote Preference		
	All Registered Voters	Assuming 65% white turnout and 55% black turnout
Fowler	11%	11%
Terrell	15	15
Jenkins	25	25
Others	14	13
Undecided	35	36
N	803	475

Abortion Attitudes over Time in Louisiana

Attitudes on abortion in Louisiana have remained very stable since 1990, the year after the *Webster* decision. As in the country as a whole, most voters in Louisiana have ambivalent feelings toward abortion and avoid committing to either extreme.

Since 1996, more Louisiana voters have held the strict anti-abortion opinion than the strict pro-choice opinion.

"Do you think abortion should be legal under any circumstance, legal under only certain circumstances or never legal under any circumstance?"							
	1988	1990	1991	1992	1995	1996	1999
Legal Under Any Circumstance	15%	21%	26%	21%	21%	21%	19%
Legal Under Certain Circumstances	54	53	50	52	51	49	52
Never Legal	27	21	19	23	21	26	26
Don't Know	4	5	5	4	7	4	3
N	835	867	746	723	805	860	803

Louisiana Opinion on Handgun Control

A majority of voters in Louisiana support the idea of tightening handgun control laws, but the overall figure masks large differences between blacks and whites and between men and women.

The "gender gap" on handgun control laws is 24%, with women expressing more support, but the racial polarization is even more dramatic. *Over three-quarters of blacks in Louisiana support stricter handgun control laws, compared to 43% of whites, creating a 34% racial difference.*

At the same time, a majority of Louisiana voters oppose limiting the sales of handguns to law enforcement officers. Only 27% of the residents of Louisiana support the limitation as compared to 46% nationwide. As with tightening handgun control laws, both women and blacks are more likely to support such a policy, but in neither group is this the majority opinion.

"What is your personal view on the issue of handgun control? Do you think that the laws on handgun control should be stricter than they are now, less strict, or are they about right?"						
	All		Whites	Blacks	Males	Females
Stricter	53%		43%	77%	40%	64%
Same	29		36	14	38	22
Less Strict	13		17	6	19	9
Don't Know	5		4	3	3	5
N	803		543	227	360	443

"Do you favor or oppose a ban on the sale of all handguns, except those that are issued to law enforcement officers?"						
	All		Whites	Blacks	Males	Females
	*US	LA				
Favor	46%	27%	22%	37%	21%	32%
Oppose	53	65	71	54	76	57
Don't Know	1	8	7	9	3	11
N	1534	803	544	226	360	443

* Source: 1996 National Election Study, University of Michigan.

Number Interviewed: 803

Dates of Interviewing: October 3-10, 1999

Sample Error: +/- 3.5%

Black: 28.2%

Female: 55%